

## Disclosure of Russian Orbital-Bomb Work Is Likely to Bring Pressure for U.S. Copy

By a WALL STREET JOURNAL Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON—Russia apparently will be able to put a nuclear bomb into orbit next year, and the immediate result of this disclosure is likely to be Congressional pressure for the U.S. to counter or match it.

The joint House-Senate Atomic Energy Military applications subcommittee, headed by Sen. Jackson (D., Wash.), opens hearings today on U.S. offensive and defensive weapons. Defense Secretary McNamara's announcement Friday about Soviet capabilities will get immediate attention. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul H. Nitze and John S. Foster, the Defense Department's research chief, will be the first witnesses.

Mr. McNamara said that, while it wasn't certain, U.S. intelligence information indicates that the Soviets have been testing what he called a fractional orbital bombardment system. If this is true, he said, they could have an initial capability in 1968. Starting in September 1966 and continuing through a week ago, the Russians fired a series of 11 unexplained space shots in low orbits which were first believed by the U.S. to be tests of new missile warheads.

The new weapon is called a "fractional" orbital bomb because, under U.S. theory at least, the warhead wouldn't make a complete orbit of the earth before it was fired at a target on the ground.

### Warning Time

Unlike the usual intercontinental ballistic missile, which reaches some 800 miles above the earth at the peak of its trajectory, the fractional orbital bomb is fired into a very low orbit of some 100 miles above the earth, and thus wouldn't be detected by this country's ballistic missile early warning radar system. At some point along its path, the warhead, slowed by rockets, drops out of orbit and plummets to its target.

Since the intended target of the new weapon couldn't be calculated by radar until the warhead headed for it, warning time would be cut from approximately 15 minutes at present to about 3 minutes.

However, the Defense Secretary said that 60 days ago the U.S. put into operation the first of a series of powerful new over-the-horizon radars that will be able to detect the firing of a missile into low orbit. The system will be fully operational early next year, he said. As a result, the U.S. will have even more warning time against a fractional orbital bomb attack than it now has against an intercontinental ballistic missile attack, Mr. McNamara said.

Even with the new over-the-horizon radar, the U.S. would have difficulty deciding whether the Russians were merely firing a new satellite into a low orbit or whether it was launching an orbital bomb to attack the U.S. But the Defense Secretary said that any attack would require a host of such firings to be effective; presumably the U.S. would regard such a massive launching as an attack on this country.

### Knocking Down Satellites

The U.S. has the ability to knock down satellites "within certain ranges," Mr. McNamara told Congress earlier this year. Presumably this referred to some antisatellite tests that have been made with Thor missiles from Kwajalein Island in the Pacific. This capability is very limited.

The U.S. presumably also will have some defense against orbital bombs when it has deployed the so-called "thin" antiballistic-missile defense against a possible Chinese attack with intercontinental missiles, although Mr. McNamara went out of his way to insist that the system will be built against the Chinese, not the Russians. But the anti-Chinese system, which has just been named the Sentinel, won't be ready until at least 1972.

Mr. McNamara said the U.S. had examined the prospects of a fractional orbital bomb system several years ago but had rejected it, believing that this country's present intercontinental missile system offered more advantages, including greater accuracy. He said that while development could be started at any time for relatively rapid deployment of such a system, "we have no intention of revising the decision made years ago."

Instead, the U.S. will continue to rely on its "second strike" capability as a deterrent against Soviet use of either orbital weapons or ICBMs. That capability means this country can suffer a surprise attack against its offensive weapons systems and still have the ability to deliver "unacceptable" losses to the Russians. The U.S. has 1,000 land-based intercontinental missiles and more than 600 submarine-based missiles in its arsenal.

### U.S. Is Puzzled

U.S. strategists, in fact, are puzzling over Russia's apparent desire to add an orbital bomb to its armory. As the U.S. is unable to stop a Russian missile attack no matter how much warning it has, merely shortening the time it takes to deliver a warhead against a U.S. target adds nothing to the Soviets' strategic capability.

Mr. McNamara's belief is that the Russians are developing the orbital bomb for possible use against Strategic Air Command bases; with a few minutes' warning, some B52 bombers at such bases can be flown out of the way of an attack and used for a retaliatory mission. Others theorize that the Russians are developing the bomb strictly for its "terror" aspects, figuring the psychological benefits are worth the cost.

By terming the Russian weapon a "fractional orbital" bomb, Mr. McNamara neatly sidestepped the question of whether the Soviets were proposing to violate the outer-space treaty, which was signed by the U.S. and Russia just last month. That treaty prohibits the placing of nuclear weapons into orbit around the earth, but a violation doesn't take place until the weapon has made a full circuit. A partial, or fractional, orbit wouldn't be a violation. Nor does the treaty ban development

of orbital bomb systems. Further, the burden of proving that a space object carried a nuclear warhead would be on the U.S.

### Congressional Reaction

But Sen. Jackson commented that, in the hearings starting today, "I want to find out if there has been a technical violation of the space treaty. In my judgment, there has been a good-faith violation."

Other Congressmen are likely to make the same point. And the outcome probably will be increased pressure for an antimissile defense that would stop a massive attack by the Russians, or greater emphasis on antisatellite defenses, or both. Some are likely to urge that the U.S. start work on its own fractional orbital bomb system. A Republican Congressman, Rep. Dickinson of Alabama, sent a telegram to President Johnson saying that the Defense Secretary should be fired because he said he was "not concerned" about the Russian development.

Mr. McNamara said the Russian tests so far indicated an orbital bomb would carry a warhead of one to three megatons; a megaton is equal to the explosive power of one million pounds of TNT. U.S. Minuteman missiles carry a one megaton warhead. But the Russians have

displayed the ability to fire vast weights into space, and some U.S. officials theorize that the Soviets might eventually develop an orbital bomb carrying what are known in the U.S. as multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles. These are clusters of warheads packed into one missile, each one of which can be sent to a different target.

Sen. Jackson commented that using that technique with the orbital bomb would cause

warheads to "come down like roman candles." The U.S., he said, needs "more and improved defenses" against fractional orbital bombs.